

## CAVERN ORIENTATION INFORMATION

All visitors must be given the cave orientation/rules before entering the cave for the first time. This is critical for their safety and the cave's protection. Your words, tone, and body language should encourage their compliance.

Orientations consist of a warm welcome, “the rules and reminders” and if at the cave natural entrance, a warning as to trail's steepness and difficulty. The warnings should be clear, concise and complete and should be delivered in a friendly, attentive, and educational manner.

Whether at the elevator or the cave entrance, first welcome the visitors and check their tickets. Tickets may be in four forms – printed by the cashier's computer (color changes throughout the year), receipt from the Ven-Tek machine, pre-made green or gold cards sold at Whites City, or white “passes” written for guests of the park or staff. If it is a park printed ticket with the perforation, tear off the stub to indicate they've entered the cave. If it is a receipt, card, or pass, ensure that the date is valid but do not tear it. (You may need to write the date on the Whites City tickets.)

If the ticket is already torn, the visitors may be returning to the cave. Ask the visitors if this is so, such as “Have you already been in the cave? Coming back for more? Etc” If they respond that they are returning to the cave, they don't need to listen to the orientation again. If they are entering the cave for the first time on this visit, then they need to be given an orientation. Remember that the entrance fee ticket is valid for three consecutive days – the day of purchase and the two following days. (Audio guide tickets are good for day of purchase only.)

The Rules and Reminders – *should be delivered in about one minute*

- Stay on the paved trail at all times. Leaving the trail could result in someone getting hurt or the cave being damaged.
- Eating and drinking are not permitted on the cave trail system, including no gum, candy, and mints. Food smells and litter must be contained in the Underground Rest-area. Food litter may attract wildlife which get lost in the cave and could die. Plain water is welcome anywhere.
- Tobacco product use of any kind is prohibited in the cave.
- Do not touch, tap, or lean on any cave walls or formations. Oils on our skin stain and waterproof the formations, preventing future growth.
- For safety, children under the age of 16 must remain in sight and arm's reach of their parent or guardian at all times. Young adults 16 and older may tour the cave on their own. One must be at least 18 years or older to serve as a guardian for younger children. This is a reminder for adults as well as children.
- Please enjoy the cave quietly. The cave is a naturally quiet environment. Keep the noise level down; no shouting, whistling, or loud talking – such as checking for echoes. If you are quiet enough, you may hear the formations growing, one drop of water at a time.
- Do not throw anything into the cavern pits and pools. They are not wishing wells. Coins and trash may stain the rocks and water, permanently contaminating the pools.



- Reminder that it's OK to take pictures and videos, even with a flash.
- Reminder that restrooms and drinking fountains are found only on the surface and in the Underground Rest Area.
- Reminder that rangers are in the cave to answer questions and help visitors as needed.
- Reminder that entry tickets are good for three consecutive days.

Information on audio guide usage, photography tips, etc., can be included in the orientation as time and interest permit. It is strongly recommended that your orientation talk be brief and to the point. Do not belabor a point, do not threaten the visitors, and do not overextend their attention span.

### Challenging situations

Usually, everything goes smoothly. The visitors are smiling and happy to listen to the orientation. But occasionally, visitors present you with a challenge. These are possible scenarios that you should be prepared for. *In all cases, speak firmly and politely.*

#### What if...?

- visitors don't seem to understand English?
  - try to "test" their language skills. Ask a non-yes-or-no question; for instance, "Where are you from?" "Have you been here before?" "Is this your first visit to the Caverns?"
  - offer them a translation from the Orientation Binder.
  - if there is more than one or two who can read together, ask one member of the group to read the rules aloud.
- visitors attempt to by-pass orientation because they don't understand English?
  - indicate that you have important information for them.
  - proceed as suggested above.
- visitors attempt to by-pass orientation because they don't want to hear it, don't think they need to hear it, or don't like rules?
  - tell them that *everyone* must hear the rules and reminders for their own safety and it should only take about a minute.
  - If they won't stop for the orientation, call Ops and have them contact Law Enforcement. Give a complete description of the "gate crashers".
- visitors arrive at the orientation eating, smoking, talking loudly, or carrying a baby stroller or walking stick?
  - Emphasize that such behavior or possessions are NOT allowed in the cave;
  - Don't stare at or otherwise single out the "perpetrators"

### Natural Entrance Orientations (ENT)

To open the entrance orientation duty station, the employee should:

1. Plan on arriving at the entrance station about five minutes before the cave opens and take a park radio.
2. Let your coworkers know that entrance station is covered by checking off the appropriate box at the VC desk.
3. Retrieve the gum buckets from the restroom closet and put them where visitors can easily



see and use them. Carry the Orientation Binder with the translations to the shade shelter for easy access throughout the day.

4. Open the sign that reads, “Wait here for ranger”.
5. Use the chains as appropriate for the number of visitors anticipated.

To close the entrance orientation duty station, wait for Main Corridor Sweep to come by. Then, throw away the gum bucket trash and put the buckets and binder in the restroom closet. Don't forget to close the “Wait here for ranger” sign.

Entrance orientations should always be done at the cave entrance shade shelter, except when lightening is present or the weather is severe, such as extreme cold, rain, or wind. Unless there is eminent danger, seek permission from a supervisor before moving the orientation station to the VC building. If conditions are too windy at the shade shelter, consider moving the orientation station down to the protection of the high walls near the black gate or drip line.

- Advise ALL visitors that the HIKE is steep and strenuous trail. (Use the word hike, instead of walk, to emphasize the difficulty.)
- It is not recommended for anyone with physical limitations, such as problems with knees, back, heart, or breathing. Diabetics and asthmatics should carry their medicine.
- Open-toed and high-heeled shoes are not recommended. Ask the visitors if they have alternative footwear.
- When the ranger encounters a visitor who for whatever reason does not seem prepared for the strenuous walk through the Natural Entrance, after the orientation tactfully try again (preferably away from the other visitors) to discourage him/her from taking the Main Corridor route. However, remember that we do not prohibit anyone from walking down the Natural Entrance.
- Wheelchairs are NOT permitted on the Natural Entrance trail for safety reasons, the person in the chair or nearby visitors could be hurt if the chair rolls out of control. If someone in a wheelchair is persistent about entering the trail, prevent their access and contact a supervisor immediately to handle the situation.
- Remind visitors that the restroom next to the parking lot is the last one they will see for about an hour.
- Point out the “sacrificial” stalagmite for them to touch before entering the cave.
- Strollers or wheelchairs are not allowed down the Natural Entrance trail. This includes models that can be folded, as visitors have been known to open them up and use them after leaving the ranger, despite assurances to the contrary. The natural entrance trail is extremely steep. Controlling any wheeled apparatus is difficult and dangerous.

During the last 15 minutes that the Natural Entrance tour is open, advise all visitors that they must keep a steady walking pace to reach the BR before it closes. Also inform them that a ranger will be following them shortly to turn out the lights and close that section of the cave. Do not be too forceful on this point. Particularly for main corridor sweep, the time frame for completion is not as tight as the big room.



## **Elevator Orientations (ELEV)**

Elevator operators also give orientations. The first elevator operator should sign in and notify VC desk staff on their way to the elevators a few minutes before the cave opens to avoid delaying cave entry. *Instructions on how to operate the elevators and their capacity are presented elsewhere in this handbook.*

As visitors arrive, welcome visitors and tear or validate their tickets. Have them gather in the elevator entry lobby. It is recommended that the group size be only enough as will fit in the elevator. When a group is assembled,

- encourage visitors to touch the sacrificial cave formation
  - ask them to dispose of gum or candy in their mouths in the trash before boarding the elevator.
  - give the rest of the orientation in the elevator on the way down (refer to Entrance Orientation section above).
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- During the last 15 minutes that the BR tour is open, advise all visitors that they must keep a steady walking pace as the closing procedures have started. Encourage visitors to enjoy themselves and to look around, but to remember that a ranger will be following them shortly to turn out the lights. Do not be too forceful but remind them that the last elevator out is at 4:45/6:15.
  - Be alert for guided tour tickets, such as for the Kings Palace. Remind them that the tour guide will take their tickets in the Underground Rest Area.

After the final orientation of the day (3:45 winter or 5:15 summer), close the elevator entrance lobby doors and turn off the light.

## **Group Orientations**

Often large groups arrive and prepare to enter the cave together. To ease the burden on the orientation rangers and to speed up their entry, they are oriented as a group. As feasible, orientations may be given on the buses, in front of the VC, in the theater (if no program is scheduled), or at the amphitheater (best for extremely large groups). Otherwise the rules and reminders may be given as usual. Exceptions are:

- emphasize the need for quiet, especially with groups of children
- remind chaperones/sponsors that they are responsible for the children's actions
- ask an adult to be first and last in children's groups to ensure they stay together
- ask groups of more than 50 to space themselves out by about five minutes
- if there is a fee waiver, sign the waiver to indicate they've heard the orientation for example: "Orientation given by Ranger Chris Doe.

